

Is the Bible the Word of God?

(by Bob Pulliam)

There are many people in the world who believe there is a supreme being, but do not believe the Bible is His word. They may accept other works claiming to be inspired revelations, or just deny that this Supreme Being has ever really given us any revelation. This is a very important topic, for if the Bible is God's word, then it has a vital message that must be heard and understood! If it is not God's word, then we must look elsewhere to know the will of our Creator.

Primary Considerations...

There are a couple of things that must be understood before we proceed:

- 1) If the Bible *is* God's word, then all other so-called revelations must be abandoned. The Bible demands this, and if it is God's word it becomes a necessity.
- 2) If the Bible *is* God's word, then we must comply with its message. It demands that one do so.

If these sound unreasonable, then you may be sure that your mind is already prejudiced on this issue, because what you have read is simple logic. Put any preconceived notions you may have aside, and consider the following.

The Method for Determination...

How do you know whether or not a book is from God? Is there a distinctive fingerprint which identifies it as such? In a way, yes. There are some distinctive features in the Bible which set it apart from other "religious" books. The same is true of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus Himself pointed out, "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Lk 11:20) Was no one else casting out demons in that day? Certainly there were (although their success was dubious). Jesus pointed them out in the preceding verse to the one noted above. What was the contrast? Whether or not Jesus did so "by the finger of God." What is meant by that?

Magicians can do many wonderful things, and fool a lot of people. This was true in the days of Pharaoh in Exodus. When Moses worked miracles in his presence, the magicians created illusions to make it look like they had done the same thing. But there came a time when they could no longer make their tricks look comparable to God's works. When this occurred, we read, "Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said." (Ex 8:19). Magicians knew the difference between tricks and a miracle. And here was a miracle. Herein is found the "finger of God." Something done which could not have been accomplished by man, and therefore had to be done by God.

Now how do we find this in a writing thousands of years old? It may be easier than you think...

The Finger of God...

The most compelling fingerprint to observe is that of fulfilled prophecy about the Christ. Some try to explain these away by telling us that the prophecies about the Christ in the Old Testament were added later. The truth is, we know exactly what the Old Testament looked like more long before Jesus came to earth. This is when the Septuagint version of the Old Testament was translated. Every book of our Old Testament is in it. For any of the Old Testament books to have been received into this version, they would have had to have been around for quite some time before that translation was made. Otherwise, they would have known that they weren't authentic, and would have excluded them. We may, therefore, safely say that all of the books of our Old Testament date well before the Septuagint Version. Many competent scholars date that version to 250 BC, leaving us with a reasonable date for all of its contents before 350 BC.

Now of these compelling prophecies we have one which offers a time frame for the coming kingdom of the Messiah. Daniel 2:40-45 places that coming kingdom during the days of the fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. That would be the Roman empire (Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, then Roman). When the New Testament rolls around, and the Christ sets up His kingdom, guess who is in power? That's right -- the Romans.

Another of these prophecies tells us where the coming Messiah would be born. Micah 5:2 tells us that it would be Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Now the prophecy could have been vague and just named Bethlehem, for there was more than one, and there would have been a better chance for fulfillment. But God didn't need "chance." He inspired Micah to name the smallest and most insignificant of Bethlehems in the land. Bethlehem Ephrathah was so insignificant that it had even been left out of some of the Old Testament listings of cities. Well here it is. The birthplace of the coming Messiah (Mt 2:6).

The means of execution was foretold in a prophetic Psalm written by David around 1000 BC. The method of execution in that day was stoning and burning. But the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced (Ps 22:16). Piercing the hands and feet in crucifixion was a later means of torture and execution, and yet it is foreordained for the Christ.

Many of the events surrounding the death of Jesus were foretold. In Psalm 22:16 a distinction is made concerning the attire of Jesus and what would become of it. Some were divided, but one piece was too precious to divide, so they cast lots for it (Jn 19:23f).

We read of the price set on Jesus' head when Judas betrayed Him. It was set at thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12f). But something even more notable occurs in the prophecy. Zechariah is told to throw that price to the potter, but he tells us that he threw it "into the house of the Lord for the potter." (V13) When we look at the fulfillment of this prophecy, we find every point validated (Mt 27:3-10; Acts 1:16-19). Incidentally, the reference to Jeremiah in Matthew 27:9 refers to the section of the Jewish Old Testament in which Zechariah was found. This section began with the prophet Jeremiah, and at times the entire section was referred to simply as Jeremiah.

Tell-Tale Details...

If the Bible were God's word we would expect it to be fulfilled in spite of the thinking of mankind. If it is man's word, then we would expect the men who wrote it to get their way! This is certainly something to consider where the Messiah was concerned. This Messiah was to be the coming prince of the Jews. He was expected to come and sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem, returning the glory of Solomon's kingdom to Israel. But this was not God's plan! Why, with this prevailing attitude toward the Messiah, did Isaiah vividly

prophecy His death? (Isa 53) In this prophecy, He looks nothing like what an entire nation was looking for. The reason is given by John, when he wrote, "These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him." (Jn 12:41) This would explain why this Isaiah 53 was written in the past tense. Isaiah saw these future events, and then wrote of them as if they had occurred.

But then consider the Jews of Jesus' day, and even the disciples themselves. Everyone thought Jesus was coming to drive out the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom (Lk 19:11; Mt 20:20f); but that was not Jesus' intention (Jn 18:36; Lk 17:20f). The disciples even thought this way up to the time of Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:6). And such is the orthodox Jew's hope to this day, but God defied the reasoning of mankind. His Christ died a torturous death on the cross, and established a kingdom which has a spiritual nature (Col 1:13).

Conclusion...

Is the Bible God's word? Did men correctly guess that the Messiah would come in the days of a particular empire, be born in a specific, obscure village, and have very precise events occur around His death? Did they just decide to take a stab in the dark by defying the prevailing notions in having Him put to death? And then you have one lone individual understanding all of this, and fulfilling it... namely, Jesus. We could speak of His miracles and how no one denied that He had supernatural power (including His enemies). We could point out that **not one** prophecy about Him failed. We could consider His teaching, or even the character of His life. But we end by returning to one of our beginning observations: If you do not believe, what preconceived notions hinder you from seeing the character of a book which has been called, "The greatest story ever told."